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NEWS Highlights

City Edition

May 10, 2007 Southwest News-Herald - City

St. Symphorosa Students Lend Hand to Soldiers

By CHUCK SALVATORE

The students from the St. Symphorosa's Extended Day Care program held a ceremony Tuesday for soldiers returning from Iraq.

Lisa Hronek, daughter of the extended day care program instructor, Patricia Hronek, found Sgt. First Class Doug Heston on www.anysoldier.com.

The extended day care program raised money and gifts to send to the Heston's Army unit (Unit 1-73 Airborne Brigade), which was made up of 32 soldiers.

The 1-73 unit was based in Italy, but spent a year in Afghanistan.

Heston has been in the Army for 10 1/2 years, and he told the students that he has enlisted for life.

Dave Stewart, also in the same unit as Heston — and who appeared with him at St. Symphorosa — enlisted for four years, and has served his time.

The students sent the soldiers boxes with Christmas stockings, CDs, candy, toiletries, White Sox material, and other items. The boxes were sent on Thanksgiving of 2005, and were received just in time for Christmas.

Heston and Stewart went to St. Symphorosa on Tuesday to thank the students and teachers.

"We made a room with all the Christmas stuff, and we divided up all the pictures and cards. It was great, (especially because) our unit had a decent number of guys from Chicago," said Heston.

The day care students gathered in the A-Hall, where they honored, thanked, prayed and sang with the returning soldiers.

"It is nice to come back. We receive so many cards and letters from so many people, you want to write back to everyone but you don't get a chance. You just don't have the time to write to everyone," said Heston. "It is great to come here and say thank you."

The ceremony was led by Patricia Hronek with the students in the program and members of Boy Scout Troop 4439, who presented Heston and Stewart with homemade American flags. Each star on the flag contained a name of a student in the program, and on the stripes were messages of encouragement.

The students sang "God Bless America" and "God Bless the USA" while waving flags for the soldiers. Then they presented them with St. Sym sweatshirts and other apparel.

"These are the people who matter to me. We are out there doing what we do for kids like these. It is very reassuring," said Stewart.

Stewart said he was thrilled by what the students did for them, and both soldiers' wives also enjoyed the ceremony and the thoughtfulness of the students.

"(The ceremony) was very meaningful," said Stewart's wife, Liz. "They showed appreciation for what our husbands did. It was very thoughtful, and it meant a lot to them."

"We had to do this for them," said Patricia Hronek. "We are all so proud of what they do fighting for our country."

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